
Anne Russell Artist Statement

My work emphasizes expressive line brought into spatial play through the use of flowing, curvilinear forms and organic, weathered materials. I work figuratively because I believe that recognizable human and animal forms afford entry into the symbolic and subconscious while remaining accessible to the viewer. Figurative work also allows me to explore the fascinating fact of bodies - human and otherwise - in interaction with the world. Our bodies are our constant and inescapable means of meeting the world around us; they are at once our somatic prison and our means of escape from our own consciousness. I bring in stories, archetypes and allegories to explore and express this most elemental of human experiences: the joy and pain of being here, now, in the flesh.

Dance teachers Bartal and Ne'eman speak of seeking "re-establishment of the human communication that has been distorted by a mechanical age." Our global society prizes verbal communication and the accelerated, omnipresent "community" available online on the Internet, at the price of ever-increasing alienation from the natural, physical world. While I participate in the online world, I am always conscious of its ephemeral, immaterial nature. Through my work I seek to offer another avenue to communication and community. My allegorical forms and organic surfaces are reminders of our own organic nature, our shared and ancient past, and our connection with each other through shared stories and a shared sense of mystery.

I find the truly expressive line irresistible, in part from spending many years in the world of dance. Dance is one of our oldest art forms and, like sculpture, uses form and line in space to convey meaning and emotion, celebration and longing. As Isadora Duncan put it, "The dancer's body is merely the luminous manifestation of the soul."

I am also fascinated by the idea of "wabi-sabi," the Japanese aesthetic centered on the acceptance of transience. I constantly seek to bring into my forms objects and materials that have been shaped and worn by exposure to time and the elements. Clay is infinitely malleable and responds eloquently to the intense transformation afforded by firing in the kiln. I work with the alchemy of the kiln to bring this same organic, weathered quality to raw clay, and then meld it with weathered metal in an organic, harmonious but imperfect whole.

Wabi-sabi is a mindset that values not only the physical beauty of such imperfect, aged objects, but the emotional impact carried by forms and materials that remind us of the passage of time and of our own finite lives. Weathered metal in particular carries within itself echoes both of human ambition in its creation and shaping, and of natural processes and ultimate mortality in its gradual disintegration. Primary among my goals for my work is this: "if an object or expression can bring about, within us, a sense of serene melancholy and a spiritual longing, then that object could be said to be wabi-sabi." (Andrew Juniper, *The Japanese Art of Impermanence*.) What I particularly love about these weathered and organic surfaces is their clear invitation to tactile exploration. I am entranced by the idea of haptic poetry: works that can only be fully understood through touch and interaction as well as visual observation. That is perhaps my highest goal: unifying, expressive, haptic, dimensional poetry, accessible to all the world.